



For Immediate Release

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SENATE PASSES WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT TO MEET WORKFORCE DEMANDS, CLOSE GAP IN SKILLED WORKERS

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee) today applauded Senate approval of the "Workforce Investment Act Amendments of 2005," S. 1021, a bill that will give states and local areas the flexibility to provide training for jobs in high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand occupations needed to ensure America's competitiveness in the global economy.

"We are facing an economic challenge that threatens our ability as a nation to compete on the world stage," Enzi said. "This bill sends a clear message that we are serious about helping our workers and employers remain competitive and about closing the skills gap that is putting America's long-term competitiveness in jeopardy."

The Senate approved the bill by unanimous consent Thursday, but must still appoint members to a Conference Committee with the House to work out differences on the reauthorization language. Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), the Committee's Ranking Member, co-sponsored the bill, which Enzi said is the product of a bipartisan process that began in the 108th Congress.

Enzi hailed the bill's passage Thursday, but cautioned that the Senate's focus must now turn to getting the measure to Conference and signing it into law. "The education and job building programs provided by the Workforce Investment Act are too important to working families, businesses, local communities and our nation's economy to delay," Enzi said. "Moving forward with a Conference Committee should be a top priority over the next few weeks."

Combined with the "Perkins Career and Technical Education Act," and the "Higher Education Amendments Act of 2005," S. 1021 will allow for real reform shaped at the state and local level with the full participation of the business community, provide needed flexibility in order to meet state and local job training needs, and focus on entrepreneurial skills and micro-enterprises coupled with the unique needs of small businesses and rural areas.

“About half of our current workforce does not have a postsecondary education degree or credential, even though our best projections suggest that job growth over the next decade will center on jobs requiring some postsecondary education or training,” Enzi added. “By passing this measure, more and more Americans likely will be able to meet the skill demands of today’s workplace.”

S. 1021 also includes amendments to the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act. These amendments encourage coordination with K-12 schools, postsecondary education and job training systems so that individuals can overcome the barriers to their participation in the workforce and have an opportunity to gain the literacy, language or core skills needed to enter and advance in their chosen profession.

Key provisions of the Workforce Investment Act will:

- Provide workers with the training they need to find new or better jobs;
- Improve existing the One-Stop Career Center delivery system to ensure that it can respond quickly and effectively to the changing needs of employers and workers in the new economy and can address the needs of special populations, including individuals with disabilities;
- Strengthen the partnership between job training programs and the private sector, with post-secondary education and training, social services, and economic development systems to prepare the 21st century workforce for career opportunities and skills in high growth sectors;
- Remove barriers that have discouraged business involvement in workforce training, while finding new mechanisms to increase and improve local business and industry influence in job training decisions across the nation;
- Improve access to services in all areas, including rural areas.
- Ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to workforce activities at one-stop centers and approved training providers;
- Expand services to the business sector to make job training more demand-driven and responsive to employers’ needs, including small employers;
- Improve youth job training activities by directing more resources to those out-of-school youth who are most in need of assistance;
- Enhance assistance for youth, between 16 to 21 years of age, seeking employment.

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